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Background

Environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and ethical decision-making are critical in many business activities and ignoring these principles is detrimental for the enterprising effort of every firm—cause-based startups, for-profit ventures, family businesses, and public firms. For example, firms often combine inputs through incrementally sequential, and well-synchronized procedures. This means that even small unethical choices in early value-chain activities can trigger devastating cascading effects that bring an otherwise smooth-running operation to a grinding halt, while undermining the reputation of a single firm, or worse, ravaging entire industries (e.g., tobacco industry). Of course, for startups and small family firms, the same poor choices might bring business disbandment. At the other end of the spectrum, social entrepreneurs and the sustainability movement are increasingly fashioning—and perhaps even leveraging on—businesses that are based on superior sustainability standards, strong social considerations, and deep ethical principles. These businesses are attractive to a significant, and growing, slice of consumers because the vales of such companies resonate with their own. Although it is clear that these are tectonic shifts that alter economic systems and social structures (e.g., social media and the Arab Spring), scholarly research and theory development on this tripartite topic are clearly lagging.
The areas of sustainability, society, ethics, and entrepreneurship motivates scholarship from diverse disciplines—e.g., management, finance, accounting, marketing, operations, supply chain, political science, sociology, psychology, and economics, to name a few. Each discipline makes significant contributions to this topical area. Also, most scholars recognize that cross-disciplinary research can be highly revelatory, but surprisingly, the number of truly cross-disciplinary studies, including in special issues, suggests the more can and should be done to intensify cross-boundary research. We think that—given the complexity and overlap of and interrelations between sustainability, society, business ethics, and entrepreneurship—it is even more important to feature manuscripts that are dedicated to exemplary cross-disciplinary studies on this multilateral topic.

The special issues (SI) calls for scholarship that is less concerned about disciplinary boundaries and more inspired to advance knowledge that sheds light on big questions related to these topical areas. We call for "edgy" scholarly work from thought leaders who dare to think "outside the sandbox" of traditional research. And we’re particularly interested in radical, controversial, novel, useful, and non-obvious scholarship that challenges research dogmas and is highly revelatory—even if not fully grounded in well-studied or well-validated theory. Of course, manuscript can't be merely descriptive or phenomenally driven, so a strong theoretical contribution is still a must.

Why the SI Needed and What Scholarship Would Fit the SI

The SI is need for several reasons, but three deserve greater attention:

**First**, not every scholar, manager, or company agrees on the connection between sustainability, ethics, and entrepreneurship. Recent research on the “green to be seen” perspective suggests that consumers are willing to pay extra for sustainable offerings, but only if there are overt status incentives or reputational outcomes that associated with such purchases (Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010). Similarly, firms—large and small—are struggling with the concept of transparency; would the benefits of touting ethical practices be outweighed by the risk that comes from revealing product provenance (e.g., the mêlée of U.S. food companies on whether to label genetically modified products)? We call for conflicting perspectives on the areas of sustainability, ethics, and entrepreneurship, particularly if they offer fertile and provocative new areas of scholarly research.

**Second**, many manuscripts that survive the typical review process are often not too novel; their expansion of theory quite limited, and their empirical insights are usually narrow. This is not a criticism of the review process or published manuscripts. Far from it; this process is rigorous, which yields highly disciplined scholarship that collectively builds an important and trustworthy body of knowledge. Moreover, we will use the same rigorous review process as
well. The difference, however, is that, as noted, we explicitly seek manuscripts that offer new, even radical theoretical perspectives; those that significantly expand existing theory; and/or those that bring breakthrough empirical insights by triangulating the domains of sustainability, ethics, and entrepreneurship.

Third, we also noticed submissions tend to homogenize; they usually follow similar empirical methodologies, converge around a dominant conceptual lens, and predictably, tackle similar research questions. This SI favors cross-disciplinary research and scholarly work that clearly shed light on both big conceptual questions and significantly practical problems that are related to these topical areas. We are especially interested in manuscripts that challenge research dogmas; scholarship that opens up new research frontiers or offers new insights that significantly enrich discussion and discourse, as well as research that addresses timely, and revelatory topics. Thus, we welcome a variety of theoretical, empirical, and cross-disciplinary approaches.

A suggestive but not exhaustive list of questions and topics includes:

- How does strategy differ when firms are not constituted as vehicles of private wealth accumulation but are owned by communities of members or government?
- How can research in other domains and disciplines—supply chain, accounting, governance, marketing, public policy, finance, and/or sociology—expand theory in the areas of sustainability, society, ethics, and entrepreneurship?
- What is social value, what are the most useful measures of social impact, and how do social value and economic value interact and shape each other? How do social entrepreneurs and cause-based ventures impact for-profit entrepreneurs and established firms?
- How is theory shaped by the dual movement of social entrepreneurship and sustainability?
- What are most useful conceptual models and empirical analysis of the antecedents, consequences, and contingencies associated with the processes of sustainable, socially responsible, and ethical entrepreneurship?
- Can social entrepreneurship combat poverty, and if so, who is winning and why?
- What innovations do social and sustainable ventures bring to for-profit enterprises?
- What can business models that employ Fair Trade, microfinance, crowd-funding, and/or green entrepreneurship teach management about social change, political impact, business ethics, and sustainability?
What are the antecedents and outcomes of new forms of governance of ventures, such as B Corps and “For Benefit” corporations? What are the implications for theory?

How bright is the line between non-profit organizations and ventures with missions that go beyond profit maximization?

How do entrepreneurs address the inevitable psychological, organizational, and strategic tensions between sustainability, ethical challenges, and profitability?

**SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINES**

Papers will be reviewed following the JMS double-blind review process. Papers should be submitted by the January 15th, 2015 deadline by e-mail to Gideon Markman (gideon.markman@colostate.edu). Papers should be prepared using the JMS Guidelines (http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/pdf/JMS_Prep_of_Manuscripts.pdf). The editors welcome informal enquiries related to proposed topics.

**Special Issue Workshop:** To help authors advance their manuscripts, a Special Issue Workshop will be held in May 2015 in Denver, Colorado. Authors of R&R manuscripts will be invited to present and discuss their papers during the workshop, but presentation at the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper for publication in JMS. Attending the workshop is not a precondition for acceptance into the Special Issue.

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